# PALESTINIAN CITIZENS OF ISRAEL: **A PRIMER**

ISSUED: JULY 2024

**PCI: Key Facts & Figures**

**INSTITUTIONALIZED DISCRIMINATION**

Number
**1.6M**
comprising 13% of the total Palestinian people and 21% of Israel's population

**Demography:**
Maintaining a Jewish demographic majority is a central goal of Israel, as a self-defined Jewish state

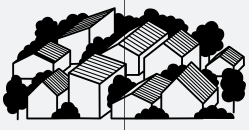
Include
**300,000**
Palestinian Bedouin citizens of Israel, more than 80,000 of whom live in unrecognized villages in the Naqab (Negev)

**Economic and social rights:**
Israel maintains wide gaps in the distribution of state resources, including in housing and land development, health and education, further marginalizing PCI

Are
**83%** Muslim **9%** Christian **8%** Druze
and speak Arabic as their native language

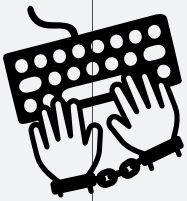
**Identity:**
Israel makes concerted efforts to erase Palestinian identity and collective memory. In 2018, it stripped Arabic of its status as an official language of the state

Reside primarily in the Galilee in the north; the "Little Triangle" in the center; and in the Naqab desert region in the South



**Land:**
Israel systematically implements policies of land confiscation, forced displacement, home demolition, and spatial and racial segregation

Constitute a national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious minority in Israel under international human rights law



**Political persecution:**
Israel limits freedom of expression and criminally prosecutes PCI leaders, and restricts political participation by PCI on ideological grounds

# **KEY** DISCRIMINATORY LAWS

- **The Law of Return (1950)** grants every Jewish person in the world the right to obtain citizenship in Israel; by contrast, Israel denies the Right of Return to the Palestinian refugees.

- **The Absentees' Property Law (1950)** defines all Palestinians who were expelled, fled, or internally displaced during the Nakba as "absentees" and their property as absentee property. The law was used to confiscate millions of dunams of land later used for Jewish-only settlement in Israel.

- **The Benefits for Discharged Soldiers Law (2008)** allows all institutions of higher education to consider military service – from which PCI (except for the Druze) are exempt – when determining student applicants' eligibility for financial assistance.

- **The Economic Efficiency Law (2009)** gives the government sweeping discretion to designate "National Priority Areas" and to allocate vast state resources for their development, which it does in a manner that systematically excludes Arab communities and localities.

- **The Admissions Committees Law (2011)** allows hundreds of small towns built on state land to select applicants for housing units and plots of land based on their "social suitability". The law is used to exclude PCI, as well as other marginalized groups. An amendment from 2023 expands the law to include more communities.

- **The Nakba Law (2011)** strips state funding from any public entity, including educational institutions, that commemorates the Nakba or rejects the existence of Israel as a "Jewish and democratic state".

- **The Expulsion Law (2016)** allows for the expulsion of Arab Knesset Members by their peers on ideological grounds, based on claims by Jewish majority members that they incite racism or support terror.

- **The Kaminitz Law (2017)** increases enforcement and penalization of planning and building offenses. The law has a disparate impact on PCI, many of whom are forced to build illegally due to decades of discrimination by the planning and building authorities.

- **The Jewish Nation-State Law (2018)** constitutionally guarantees the Jewish ethnic-religious character of Israel, denies Palestinians the right to self-determination, entrenches privileges for Jewish citizens, and promotes Jewish settlement as a national value, while anchoring discrimination and racism against PCI.

- **The Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law (2022)** bans family unification in Israel between PCI and their spouses from the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The law replaced a prior "temporary order" originally passed in 2003, which was in effect until 2021.

- **The 'Ben-Gvir Law' (2023)** subordinates the Israeli police to the National Security Minister and expands his powers, including over national police policy. The Minister explicitly stated that the law's purpose was to make structural changes to open-fire regulations, and investigation and prosecution policies, which have already heightened police violence and aggression against PCI.

- **The 'Ban on Consuming Terrorist Materials Law' (2023)** amends the 2016 Counter-Terrorism Law, introducing this new criminal offense. It is one of the most draconian legislative measures ever passed in Israel as it criminalizes passive consumption of material and even thoughts, as part of a crackdown on personal freedoms.

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# HISTORY

**Pre-1948:** Palestinians live in their ancestral homeland of historic Palestine, which includes the modern-day State of Israel. In 1914, Palestinians comprised about 92% of the population. Jewish immigration to Palestine begins in significant and increasing numbers under the British Mandate (1923-1948).

**1948:** More than 750,000 Palestinians flee or are forced to flee from their homes during the Nakba ("Catastrophe"), and 500 Palestinian villages are destroyed by Zionist militia forces. Just 150,000 Palestinians remain in their homeland – around 25% of whom are internally displaced – becoming Palestinian citizens of Israel (PCI).

**1948-1966:** The Israeli government imposes military rule exclusively on PCI, severely limiting their freedom of movement both within the state and abroad, their means of making their livelihoods, and their political expression. Simultaneously, Israel passes a raft of laws to dispossess Palestinians of their land and to transfer it to state ownership or control.

**1967:** Following the Naksa ("Set-back") in the 1967 war, Israel annexes East Jerusalem and the surrounding Palestinian villages, and occupies the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Syrian Golan Heights, and Sinai Peninsula. These events, paired with the lifting of military rule in 1966, lead to increased political activism and mobilization by PCI.

**1976:** In response to a wave of land expropriations, on 30 March 1976, local Palestinian leaders announce a general strike and organize protests throughout the Galilee. Israel deploys 4,000 police officers, as well as some military units, to confront the demonstrators, kill six PCI and wound and arrest many more. This event is a milestone in the national collective struggle of PCI and is commemorated annually by Palestinians in Israel and beyond as "Land Day".

**1980s & 1990s:** As PCI began to rebuild their national institutions, they also protest alongside Palestinians in OPT during the First Intifada (1987-1993). The Oslo Accords, signed in 1993 and 1995, offer the prospect of an independent Palestinian state. Some PCI assert their identity both as Palestinians and as a national and ethnic minority in Israel, and demand that Israel become a "state for all its citizens".

**2000:** At the beginning of the Second Intifada (2000-2005), in early October, PCI organize protests in Arab towns in Israel. Israeli police kill 12 unarmed PCI and one Palestinian from Gaza with live bullets and injure hundreds more throughout the country. The Or Commission of Inquiry in 2003 finds there was no real threat posed to police officers and thus no justification for the live gunfire that led to the killings. By 2008, the State Attorney and the Attorney General close all the investigatory files against law enforcement officers and commanders.

**2009 onwards:** Right-wing governments, mostly led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, initiate widespread campaigns of incitement against PCI and pass a wave of racist and discriminatory laws that violate their rights.

**2021:** During the May Dignity Uprising, PCI engage in mass protests in solidarity with Palestinians in East Jerusalem and in the Gaza Strip sparked by police brutality against worshippers at the Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Demonstrators were also met by extreme police brutality and movement restrictions, including curfews. Militant Israeli-Jewish groups, including settlers, attack PCI and their property and desecrate mosques with police protection and collusion in many Jewish-Arab cities in Israel.

**2023/2024:** The most radical right-wing government in Israel's history introduces a new wave of discriminatory and anti-democratic legislation and attempts a judicial overhaul to undermine the Supreme Court's power and the rule of law, a move that thousands protest against on a weekly basis. On 7 October 2023, Israel launches a retaliatory offensive on Gaza following an unprecedented attack in Israel by Hamas, killing 1,200 and taking 250 hostages into Gaza. There ensures a severe crackdown on the rights to free expression and protest by PCI targeting university students, employees, lawyers, among others. The War on Gaza rages on, with, as of 1 July 2024, almost 38,000 Palestinians killed and over 87,000 injured, and thousands more still under the rubble.